

TO: Darien Board of Education
FR: Mary Jo Kramer, Superintendent of Schools
RE: Recommended Option for Update of Tokeneke School
DT: November 16, 2003 (revised March 4, 2004)

Introduction:

In November of 2002, the architects of Fletcher Thompson presented the Board with a feasibility study on the options for updating Tokeneke School. The study provided an analysis of the extent of the upgrade needs, with particular attention to the school's infrastructure, code compliance, educational and operational functionality, and security. Delineated in the report were four options ranging from renovation of the existing facility to constructing a new one on the existing site.

Following the Fletcher Thompson presentation, the administration provided additional information to clarify various aspects of the study. The Tokeneke School Feasibility Summary Report was produced in the spring of 2003 and revised throughout the summer and the fall as we provided the Board with additional information about the timelines and schedules, a capital projects approach to update the facility, cost benefit analysis, the impact upon fields and facilities, alternatives to the original options, and the rationale, advantages and disadvantages for each option. Aside from presentations at numerous board meetings, two presentations were made at Tokeneke School and the views of parents were elicited. Careful analysis and deliberations over the past year has led to the administration's conclusions and recommendations.

Conclusions:

There is no question that Tokeneke School requires a major upgrade. The school's aging infrastructure, combined with the educational and operational disadvantages of its campus-type structure, dictate a substantial investment in the facility. Many of the facility's infrastructure components have reached, or will reach within the not too distant future, the end of their useful lives. Repairs to the buildings are increasingly frequent and difficult. As exemplified by the classrooms with electric heat, some repairs cannot satisfactorily be made cost efficiently. Direct access to many rooms from the outside further adds to the maintenance demands of the school, as does its

wood and glass construction. The type of construction and the direct access from outside also results in considerable energy inefficiency.

The campus design not only compounds the infrastructure and maintenance problems, but also poses some issues that adversely affect the school's operation and delivery of education. The common room is limited because it must function as a "corridor" with no air lock or vestibule, a limited stage area, and no separate space for cafeteria serving. The below grade gymnasium, also with direct access from outside, requires ongoing attention to prevent moisture problems. The original classrooms need improvement in lighting, windows, ventilation, and handicap access to bathrooms. While some of these issues were corrected with the 1996 renovation of classrooms, the need for handicap accessible bathrooms led to a room configuration that limited usable instructional space to 550 square feet.

When compared to the other schools in the district and any modern elementary school, office and conference space is very limited. Unlike the other Darien elementary schools, the campus-type layout also makes security much more difficult to achieve because the school has no single controlled access point.

Because the infrastructure problems are interrelated, the upgrade of Tokeneke School cannot be treated as a series of building projects over many years. While interim measures will need to be taken to keep the school maintained, a substantial construction project must be undertaken within the next five years to preserve the educational integrity of the school program, and to provide an environment that is safe, well maintained and conducive to learning.

Recommendation:

Over the course of the past months, the board and administration has concluded that the most viable options were:

- Renovation (Option A), possibly combined with replacing the gymnasium and restructuring the 1996 classrooms, **or**
- New Construction (Option C)

In narrowing the options to these two, consideration was given to cost benefit over the short and long term, comparability of security among schools, longevity of the upgrade, duration of construction, future upkeep and durability, and educational operation and delivery. These criteria were applied to both options to arrive at our recommendation that the most cost effective and educationally sound course of action is to construct a new facility.

The reasons for recommending Option C can be summarized for each criteria as follows:

1. **Cost-benefit Analysis:** Although Option C will cost more than Option A over a twenty year bond period, the long term financial benefit of a new facility clearly outweighs the lower short term expenditure. In present value dollars, Option C will result in a savings of almost \$9,000,000 over the next fifty years. This presumes that a new school will last longer than a renovated school.
2. **Educational and Operational Uses of the School:** A new facility would correct all the current limitations in the facility and make it much more conducive to effective delivery of the educational program and daily operations.
3. **Security:** A single access point can be achieved and overall access will be limited through the construction of interconnected classrooms and common spaces in a two-story facility. All other elementary schools in Darien have a single access point, usually the main door.
4. **Maintenance and Energy Efficiency:** While a new facility will obviously require less maintenance relative to both major projects, repairs and daily maintenance, it will also enable greater efficiency of energy usage.
5. **Duration of Construction:** Under Option C, the length of construction would be two years versus the five years required for a renovation. The adverse impact upon the delivery of education during construction would be greatly reduced.

6. **Longevity of the Facility:** A new facility would last approximately seventy-five years as opposed to the twenty-five year life span of a renovation.
7. **Field Space:** The added benefit of a two-story facility would be additional field space for the school and community.
8. **Modernized Instructional Space:** A new facility would allow for proper instructional and operational spaces in all classrooms and common areas.

For all of these reasons, constructing a new school provides the greater educational benefit for students, parents, faculty and community.